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# **The Complete History of Theatre (abridged)**

By

MATT THOMPSON

**Dramatic Publishing Company**

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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MATT THOMPSON

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(THE COMPLETE HISTORY OF THEATRE [ABRIDGED])

ISBN: 978-1-61959-162-2

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*The Complete History of Theatre (abridged)* premiered on June 2, 2016, at Point Loma Playhouse in San Diego.

Cast:

STAN ..... John Tessmer  
BILL..... Tom Steward  
SARAH ..... Hilary White  
ENSEMBLE ..... Steve Smith

Production Staff:

Director ..... Matt Thompson  
Set and Prop Designer..... William Rickman  
Costumer ..... Delilah Sanderville  
Sound Designer..... Matt Warburton  
Lighting Designer ..... Bill Ulrich

# The Complete History of Theatre (abridged)

## CHARACTERS

**WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (Bill):** A goofball who has penned the world's most famous plays. Fun-loving and outgoing, Bill seems to act more like a child than the genius who penned some of the world's greatest works of theatrical art.

**CONSTANTINE STANISLAVSKY (Stan):** The Russian scholar. Bill's great friend. He attempts to wrangle Bill's childish attitude and Sarah's ego in order to continue the play.

**SARAH BERNHARDT (Sarah):** The greatest actress the stage has ever known, for the stage can barely contain her talent, her love for applause and her ego.

**ENSEMBLE MEMBER:** Plays Stage Manager / House Manager / Playwright / Producer / Sound Designer / Light Designer / Set Designer / Costume Designer / Director / Stage Hand.

Note: The piece may be expanded up to 13 actors. Dividing the ensemble roles does not affect the flow of the show, but it's a fun challenge for one actor to play all of them. Feel free to embellish the ensemble characters as the production sees fit. The ensemble and gender-neutral audience interactions have been written as male, but feel free to change pronouns as necessary.

## PROP LIST

Clipboard  
Note cards  
Script in a red binder  
Fake cellphone  
A life-sized stuffed dummy  
Flashlight  
Tape measure  
Hammer  
Two towels  
Fake arrow that is bent  
Pillow  
A simple silver bell  
Fake straight razor  
Paint brush  
Fake sausage  
Pipe  
Monocle or eye glasses  
Royal pen  
Royal pad of paper  
Fake human skull  
Fake gladiator sword  
Newspaper  
Sweep broom

## PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE

This piece is quick in tone and pace, and it is meant to be funny and full of improvisation. Don't let the audience get ahead of the curve on this one. Obviously the entire history of theatre is not presented here, as I have chosen to highlight some of the best and brightest moments of theatrical history. Keep it snappy, keep it light and, above all, have fun with it! Special thanks to Mac Wellman and La Mama Theatre Umbria.

The lines that are scripted are essential to keep the piece moving, but the moments of audience interaction are paramount to the structure of the play. Actors should feel free to riff with the audience members.

Another note about costumes, the original production had the characters in full costumes with the exception of tennis shoes. This allowed the audience to realize the free-spirited feeling of the piece while also ensuring that the actors were on stable footing throughout each performance. As a reminder, this play works best when the audience acts like another character.

With regards to the voice over that announces, "abridged," feel free to cast this technical restraint aside if you feel that the audience has heard it enough times. Alternatively, in larger casts an ensemble character can shout it out for a more improvised feel. Past productions have been able to get the audience to acknowledge and pronounce the "abridged" lines just by gesturing to the crowd beginning halfway through the piece. There is flexibility with this element. With that said, the production must include the three differing endings, meaning all three must be rehearsed so that the audience is once again fully involved. It's a massive bit of fun and keeps the cast on their toes!

A prop list is included at the back of the playbook.



STAN. We have one element of the theatre that we have yet to explore. Bill, if you please.

BILL. Ladies and gentlemen we highlight the world's best and brightest ...

*(A quick dramatic music tag.)*

ALL. Playwrights and composers of the theatrical world!

SARAH. We start with the Greek comedian—

ALL. Aristophanes!

BILL. Look out for the birds!

*(STAN and SARAH duck and cover.)*

STAN & SARAH. AHHHHHH!

ALL. Aeschelus!

SARAH/CLYTEMNESTRA. Agamemnon?

STAN/AGAMEMNON. Yes, dear?

SARAH / CLYTEMNESTRA. Don't walk on the carpet!

ALL. Noel Coward!

BILL *(to SARAH with an English accent)*. Where are our private lives?

SARAH *(with an English accent)*. Nothing in our life is private. It's all a bedroom farce.

ALL. Edward Albee!

SARAH/MARTHA *(with a cigarette dangling from her lips)*.  
George!

STAN/GEORGE. What?

SARAH/MARTHA. Between your heat and my gall it's surprising that we haven't taken over Cuba yet.

STAN/GEORGE. Have another drink, Martha.

*(BILL runs into the scene, wearing a ragged shirt.)*

BILL. I've been to the zoo with three tall women and had an affair with goat named Silvia!

ALL. Woody Allen!

*(BILL puts on a pair of “Woody Allen” like glasses. SARAH stands there looking sexy.)*

SARAH . Hi. I’m Ziggy.

BILL/WOODY ALLAN. Hi. Well ... You have very nice ... hair ... And ya know ... it’s just that ... well I ... who would have thought that ... you know ... I mean I’m not quite sure if ... well ... You’re very beautiful ... You remind me of my mother.

ALL. Samuel Beckett!

*(The actors quickly move around and assume positions. BILL sits on one side of the stage and puts on a bowler hat. STAN sits on the other side of the stage. SARAH stands in the middle and assumes the shape of a tree. They speak with Irish accents.)*

STAN. What are we doing?

BILL. Waiting.

STAN. For how long?

BILL. As long as it takes.

*(Beat. SARAH gives BILL a look.)*

ALL. Christopher Marlowe!

STAN. Is this the face that launched a thousand ships?

ALL. Chekov!

*(Klaxon SFX.)*

BILL *(with a bad Russian accent)*. Klingons are attacking us, keptin!

STAN *(very Captain Kirk-like)*. Red alert! Shield’s up! Fire all phasers!

*(Klaxon SFX cuts.)*

ALL. Eugene O'Neil!

*(BILL runs around like an ape and grunts.)*

STAN. What's that hairy ape trying to say?

SARAH. Iceman cometh with me.

ALL. David Henry Hwang!

*(STAN flitters around like a butterfly.)*

SARAH *(singing the alphabet)*. A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J,  
K, L, M—

BILL *(pointing at STAN)*. Butterfly.

ALL. Richard Greenberg!

*(STAN and BILL wrap themselves in towels and hold baseball caps.)*

STAGE MANAGER *(to SARAH)*. I'm afraid you're stuck here, ma'am. There's three days of rain.

STAN & BILL *(singing)*. Oh, say can you see?!

SARAH *(watching STAN and BILL, smiling)*. I sure can!  
Never take me out of here!

ALL. Jonathan Larson!

*(BILL hands STAN a check.)*

STAN. What's this?

BILL. The rent.

ALL. Steve Martin!

SARAH *(with a French accent)*. Who are you?

STAN (*putting on a beret*). I'm Picasso!

BILL (*putting on a fake arrow that looks like it's through his head*). I'm Einstein!

BILL & STAN. We're two wild and crazy guys!

ALL. Martin McDonough!

*(Someone throws a pillow at BILL. He walks around with a pillow making sounds while SARAH drums on a theatre box. He throws the pillow aside.)*

ALL. Sarah Ruhl!

STAN. Where are you going?

SARAH. Out!

STAN. Not until you clean the house.

ALL. Bertolt Brecht!

SARAH (*with a Cockney accent*). How much for the opera?

BILL. Three penny.

ALL. Thornton Wilder!

*(BILL and SARAH lock arms and walk.)*

BILL. Where are we?

BILL & SARAH (*looking at each other lovingly*). Our town.

ALL. Tom Stoppard!

STAN. We're actors! We're the opposite of people.

ALL. Neil Simon!

BILL. (*as quick and clear as possible*). As I left my *Plaza Suite* I was walking *Barefoot in the Park* when I got *Lost in Yonkers* and ran into *The Sunshine Boys*. I got the *Biloxi Blues* when I heard that there were *Rumors* that they were *Broadway Bound*. I chatted with *Jake's Women* and they

said *Come Blow Your Horn*. They offered me *Promises, Promises* and said that they were *The Last of the Red Hot Lovers*. *The Odd Couple* told me to stop by their *California Suite*, or was it the *London Suite*, but when I got there I felt like *The Prisoner of Second Avenue*. So I told *The Goodbye Girls* that I offered them some *Sweet Charity* by being *The Good Doctor* and left them at *The Dinner Party* with *The Gingerbread Lady*.

*(The cast looks to the audience for a moment, waiting for a quick applause that may or may not happen.)*

ALL. Bob Fosse.

*(They all dance with a two-step back and forth for three beats.)*

ALL. Jazz hands, jazz hands, jazz hands! *(Beat.)* Tony Kushner!

*(The STAGE MANAGER hums the second stanza of "The Star Spangled Banner." The other actors put their hands in the air as angels.)*

ALL *(angelically)*. Ahhhhhhh! *(Beat.)* Gershwin!

SARAH *(singing)*. SUMMER TIME AND IT'S HOT AS FIIIIIIIRE!

ALL. John Guare!

BILL. I know John Johnson.

STAN. Who knows Dick Dickerson.

SARAH. Who knows Fred Fredrickson who's great friends with Kevin Bacon!

ALL. Six Degrees of Separation.

ALL. Lillian Hellman!

SARAH. Finally a female playwright with integrity, poise and a lot to say.

BILL. Lily?

SARAH. Yes?

BILL. Go to the attic!

SARAH. Damn!

ALL. Henrik Ibsen!

STAN. Heady?

SARAH (*making the shape of a gun with her hand*). Ya Lovberg?

STAN. Gimme the gun!

*(SARAH raises the gun to her head.)*

ALL. William Inge!

*(STAN sits on a chair. SARAH sits on the floor.)*

SARAH. Want to stay for the picnic?

STAN. Gotta catch a bus.

ALL. Ionesco!

SARAH. All right, bring in the rhinoceros.

*(BILL and the ENSEMBLE MEMBER imitate a rhinoceros and chases STAN. STAN and SARAH yell as they grab two chairs and place them downstage.)*

STAN & SARAH. AHHHHHH!

ALL. Sophocles!

STAN. Your profile said you like guys who lead?

SARAH. Yeah, my husband is dead and I'm looking for someone to take over Thebes.

STAN. The thing is ... I really like older women.

ALL. David Ives!

*(STAN and BILL switch places on the chairs. STAN stands between them with a bell.)*

BILL. Do you like Steinbeck?

*(STAN hits the bell.)*

BILL *(cont'd)*. Do you like Hemingway?

*(Bell.)*

BILL *(cont'd)*. Do you like Faulkner?

*(Bell.)*

BILL *(cont'd)*. How was your bicycle ride?

SARAH. I'm on a bicycle built for two. Care to join?

BILL *(holding her hand)*. Sure.

BILL & SARAH. Waiter!

*(Multiple bell rings.)*

ALL. Lorca!

STAN. *Donde estas?*

SARAH. *En tu corazon!*

ALL. David Mamet!

*(ENSEMBLE MEMBER enters. Chairs are turned to emulate a pawn shop. Every "BLEEP" in this section is replaced by the ringing of the bell, performed by ENSEMBLE MEMBER.)*



STAN/TEACH. No more talk about that BLEEPing Indian head nickel, you ignorant BLEEP!

BILL/BOBBY. What about the BLEEPing pastrami sandwich you ordered, you little BLEEP??

SARAH/DONNY. Teach?

STAN/TEACH. Yeah?

SARAH/DONNY. Go, BLEEP yourself.

ALL. Arthur Miller!

*(STAN grabs a suitcase and hat and transforms into an older man. BILL puts on a cardigan sweater.)*

STAN/WILLY. Biff?

BILL/BIFF. Yes, Father?

STAN/WILLY. We've got to buy a new refrigerator. *(Breaking down crying.)* We've got to buy this family a new refrigerator!

BILL/BIFF. It's OK, Dad. We'll just eat out.

ALL. Clifford Odets!

*(STAN crouches down imitating a baseball catcher.)*

BILL. What are you doing?

STAN. Waiting for the lefty.

ALL. Pirendello!

SARAH. Do we know this author?

STAN. Give me six characters and I'll get back to ya.

ALL. Harold Pinter!

*(BILL and STAN stand on either side of the stage staring at each other. They speak with Cockney accents.)*

BILL. What are you eating?

*(An extensive, Pinter-like pause as they stare at each other.)*

STAN. Toast.

*(Another long pause.)*

BILL. Is that jelly or jam?

*(Another long pause as STAN “chews his toast.”)*

STAN. Marmalade.

*(Another long pause.)*

BILL. Looks good.

*(Another long pause.)*

STAN. Wanna bite?

*(Another long pause.)*

BILL. No, thank you. I prefer crumpets.

ALL. Sam Shepard!

BILL/AUSTIN *(typing on an imaginary typewriter)*. “I looked up into the brown rolling waves of the desert landscape. The aroma of the sand smelled of pickles and donuts dripping off a tar-glazed rooftop. A lobster shaped leopard and a porcupine with potato legs strolled in with quail eggs for breakfast.”

*(STAN enters wearing a cowboy hat.)*

STAN/LEE. How’s the screenplay going Austin?

BILL/AUSTIN. Saul buried a toaster in the backyard under the corn.

STAN/LEE. That toaster was our brother!

ALL. Jean-Paul Satre!

*(SARAH and STAN sit, staring off into the distance.)*

SARAH *(looking around)*. Where's the exit?

STAN. It's in your mind.

ALL. John Patrick Shanley!

*(SARAH and BILL put on nun habits.)*

SARAH/SISTER *(with a New York accent)*. What's the matta, sister?

BILL/SISTER *(struggling to put on the head gear)*. I doubt I can fit into this nun outfit!

*(They discard the nun outfits.)*

ALL. Peter Shaffer!

AMADEUS, AMADEUS, OH, OH, OH AMADEUS!

*(ENSEMBLE MEMBER enters, crossing the stage on a toy horse.)*

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. Neaaaaah!

ALL. Tracey Letts!

*(STAN pokes BILL several times.)*

BILL *(with an Oklahoma accent)*. You're killing me, Joe, go bug your brother.

STAN *(with an Oklahoma accent)*. He's my cousin.

SARAH *(with an Oklahoma accent)*. I'm his fiancée.

BILL. When are you getting married?

SARAH & STAN. Sometime in August.

ALL. George Bernard Shaw!

*(Beat.)*

SARAH. There's nothing short about him, so let's move on!

BILL & STAN. Right!

ALL. Sondheim!

*(BILL sits in a chair. STAN grabs a strait razor as SARAH watches nearby.)*

BILL.

I HOPE, I HOPE I GET IT.

I NEED A SHAVE GOOD FELLOW.

CAN'T YOU HELP ME PLEASE AND BE MY HOST.

SARAH.

SIT DOWN AND YOU'LL MAKE A NICE PIE.

BILL.

WHAT'S THAT?

SARAH.

I MEAN YOU'RE A PLEASANT GUY!

STAN.

I'LL BE SO GOOD TO HIM AS I SLICE HIM UP LIKE  
A ROAST.

BILL.

A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON MY WAY TO THE  
FORUM AS I WAS LISTENING TO A LITTLE  
NIGHT MUSIC WHEN I WALKED INTO THE  
WOODS SUNDAY IN THE PARK WITH GEORGE  
I THOUGHT I SAW SOME ASSASSINS BUT IT  
WAS ONLY A BUNCH OF FOLLIES!

ALL. Strindberg!

STAN. Miss Julie?

*(BILL coos like a bird.)*

SARAH/MISS JULIE. Yees?

STAN. Gimme the meat cleaver.

ALL. Rogers and Hammerstein!

*(BILL takes the tricorne hat and launches into song, in a tune similar to "I Am the Very Model of a Modern Major-General." STAN might sword fight with him while he does this.)*

BILL.

I KNOW I AM THE KING AND I,  
BUT HOW DID ANNIE GOT HER GUN,  
GET HER TO OKLAHOMA,  
'ROUND THE CAROUSEL JUST FOR FUN,  
LOOK ACROSS THE ALLEGRO,  
ME AND JULIET ARE SO SWEET,  
IT'S JUST A PIPE DREAM, DON'T YOU KNOW,  
I FEEL LIKE DANCING WITH MY FEET  
SO CAST HER DOWN THE BIG RIVER,  
TO FIND THE BOYS FROM SYRACUSE,  
YOU HEAR THE SOUND OF MUSIC THERE?  
THE STATE FAIR'S COMING TWO BY TWO,  
DO I HEAR A WALTZ OUT THERE?  
CALL ME MADAM WOULD YOU DARE?  
CONNECTICUT YANKEE—CAMELOT,  
IN SOUTH PACIFIC, WHERE IT'S HOT,  
A FLOWER DRUM SONG SO IT GOES,  
COMRADE GET UP ON YOUR TOES  
THE SHOW BOAT'S COMING UP TO SHORE ...

*(ENSEMBLE MEMBER enters.)*

ALL *(to BILL)*. Gilbert and Sullivan!